



PHILIPPINE PHILATELIC JOURNAL

Volume XIII, No. 1



First Quarter, 1991

**FROM THE ALLIED INTELLIGENCE BUREAU
TO MINDANAO: THE "FREE PHILIPPINES"
GUERRILLA STAMPS**

by Walter H. Adler

Reprinted from American Philatelist, September, 1982

During World War II a 2-centavo stamp known as the "Free Philippines" Guerrilla stamp was issued for use on the island of Mindanao. The stamp was printed in Australia and delivered to Col. Wendell W. Fertig, Commanding Officer of the 10th Military District, Guerrilla Forces, with headquarters at Esperanza in Agusan Province, Mindanao, Philippines.

The stamps were printed in sheets of twenty-five (Figure 1), in rows of five by five. All were of 2-centavo denomination, printed in blue

on white paper, and measuring 1.95 by 3.75 cm. They were printed by the letterpress process, with rouletted perforations. They show a Series 1943 dating.

Virtually all that is known of the stamp is found in a 1949 study¹ by Pablo Esperidion of the Philippines, and a subsequent study in 1961² by Arnold H. Warren of the United States.



Figure 1. Full sheet of the 2-centavo blue-on-white Philippine Guerrilla stamps issued by the "Free Philippines," 10th Military District, Esperanza, Mindanao.

Realizing that many questions remained unanswered in the previous studies, I undertook and developed a research project over the past three years. Ferreting out answers to many of the remaining questions has been a difficult and time-consuming task involving a great deal of correspondence and the help of a large number of people. It should be realized that time, distance, and the cloak of wartime secrecy all have been factors that impeded my progress at the outset.

I did not know even the names of all the key persons involved, and as the study progressed it was revealed that two of the most directly involved, key people who could have helped the most, Cols. Allison Ind and Wendell W. Fertig, were deceased. The third key figure mentioned in both the previous studies, Cdr. Charles R. "Chick" Parson, United States Naval Reserve, has not responded to my several letters of inquiry.

In the beginning, there were six questions which intrigued me:

1. *Who printed the Guerrilla stamps?*
2. *Where were they printed?*
3. *What printing process was used?*
4. *Where was the written documentation regarding the alleged authorization from Pres. Manuel A. Quezon?*
5. *Was the data correct given by Esperidion and Warren in their articles?*
6. *Were the numbers of stamps printed correct as stated by these authors?*

Those questions, in turn led to a series of additional ones:

1. *Who placed the order for the stamps?*
2. *Who designed the stamp?*
3. *What was the date of printing?*
4. *Who paid for the stamps?*
5. *Where did the funds come from?*
6. *Who picked the stamps up from the printer's?*
7. *To whom were the stamps given and to whom delivered?*
8. *How was the order paid for?*
9. *Who delivered the stamps to Colonel Fertig?*
10. *On what submarine were they taken to Mindanao?*
11. *How many stamps were delivered to Mindanao?*
12. *How many unused stamps are still in existence?*
13. *How many stamps were used on covers, and how many of those still exist?*
14. *Were covers prepared only on Mindanao?*
15. *Were the covers used both for local service on Mindanao as well as for mail leaving Mindanao for overseas addresses?*
16. *What was the first day of issue of the stamps and covers?*

Discovery of the answers to these numerous questions would clarify the picture and, it was hoped, would provide a complete history for collectors of this unique Philippine stamp.

In a research project such as this, one of the great problems is to find people with specific knowledge of the events relative to the stamp. In this case I was able to locate a number of key people who "had been there" but who had not been consulted for the earlier studies. Among them were Maj. Bobb B. Glenn and Capt. Charles Wilcox, who worked in the Supply Section of the Allied Intelligence Bureau (AIB); Capt. Edward Williams, who was in the Philippine Sub Section of G-2 (Intelligence, AIB); Col. Charles M. Smith and Capt. Jordon Hamner, who were Party Leaders in the Philippine Island Section of AIB; Lt. Col. J.L. Evans, who was a medical officer and radio operator working in Colonel Fertig's 10th Military District Headquarters; Capt. Jesus J. Montalvan, who was the Adjutant in Colonel Fertig's headquarters (and had been consulted for the earlier studies but

provided further information for the present study); and Mr. A.C. Donald, who was the Managing Director of the printing firm of Simpson, Halligan and Co. in Australia.

Mindanao

This, briefly, was the situation on Mindanao: After the surrender of the United States Army Forces Far East (USAFFE) on Corregidor Island in May 1942, many guerrilla groups were formed throughout the Philippine Islands. Conditions for a guerrilla movement on Mindanao were favorable. There were a large number of unsundered American and Filipino servicemen on the island; the Island was large and sparsely populated; and the Japanese occupied only a few cities in the coastal areas.

The rest of the island - approximately ninety-five percent - remained in American and Philippine hands. By February 1943, General MacArthur's Headquarters, South West Pacific Area, Australia, had established radio contact with Col. Wendell W. Fertig, after which Colonel Fertig was confirmed as Commanding Officer of the 10th Military District, which was comprised of all of Mindanao and the Sulu Islands. Later, the Sulu Archipelago was separated from the 10th Military District.

Colonel Fertig attempted to use all methods possible to hold the people together and, at the same time, build a guerrilla force. It is true that General MacArthur wanted Colonel Fertig to gather intelligence for the South West Pacific Area Headquarters; however, Fertig felt that it was imperative that there be resistance to the Japanese to maintain the moral of the Filipino people. Fertig also realized that there had to be tangible evidence that General MacArthur and the United States had not forgotten the Philippine people. As a result, such items as recent issues of Life magazine, book matches, medicines, and weapons were brought in by submarine.

All of this leads up to the original idea for the stamp. In Warren's article of October 1961, he stated that "Colonel Fertig said that he originated the idea."² This could be very true; however, others have credited Charles Parsons, now residing and working in the Philippines, others have given credit to Charles Smith, and it also has been suggested that the idea originated with Col. Allison Ind, who worked in Philippine Island Section, AIB.

In some of my correspondence with persons who worked in Colonel Fertig's headquarters, it became apparent that only a few persons were

aware of the existence of the stamps and their usage. The same was true at MacArthur's GHQ in Australia. Edward Williams, of the Allied Intelligence Bureau, wrote: "We did not know of this business until a subsequent submarine from Mindanao brought in franked letters."⁷

The usage of the stamp on Mindanao by various people has been an interesting study. Was the stamp issued for legitimate postal purposes, or for morale purposes, or both? Esperidion wrote:

Originally, the use of the stamp was for military personnel only of the 10th Military District. Later on, however, civilians were allowed to use them within the said military area. Although civilians were allowed to use them on mail, these stamps were not sold at any civilian post office in the unoccupied areas, there being no civilian post offices in operation.¹

I do know from my research that eight persons used the stamps on covers. The eight were all military men; namely, Capt. Jesus Montalvan, Capt. Filamon Lagman, Col Charles M. Smith, Cpl. Rafael Martinez, Col. W.W. Fertig, Maj. Calexto M. deLeon, Lt. Cdr. M.M. Wheeler, Lt. R.L. Thommes, and Sgt. P.R. Echam.

Capt. Filamon Lagman was Colonel Fertig's Adjutant prior to the arrival of Captain Montalvan, Infantry, Adjutant to the Chief of Staff, G-2 Section (Intelligence), 10th Military District. It was from Captain Lagman that Montalvan received the rubber canceling devices that are observed on the 10th Military District Guerrilla covers.

In a letter that I received from Montalvan dated March 7, 1980, he states:

Colonel Charles Smith told me that five hundred Guerrilla stamps were given to Colonel Fertig... I do not know what happened to the supply of stamps that was not given to me for the trial run. I received only twenty-five stamps...used by me to send letters to President Manuel Quezon, Vice President Osmena, General Basilio Valdez, and Colonel Soriano (Philippine Government in exile in the United States) by submarine, and by courier to my wife, and other friends that I cannot remember now... I remember Colonel Smith told me that President Manuel Quezon ordered the printing of the two centavo stamp for use between Guerrilla units in the Free Philippines for the identification and other purposes, but due to the Japanese pressure in all areas, the plan was not carried out and only Mindanao was able to use it. The first mail bearing the Guerrilla stamp was sent by Colonel Fertig before I took the G-2 office and I believe it was censored by him and no other. I gave one envelope to Lt. Thommes personally and he requested me to do all the marking, in fact it was marked by the Post Office of Mambajao, Misamis Oriental to show that the area was not occupied by the enemy and where Lt. Thommes was stationed at the time.¹⁶

This particular Guerrilla cover just referred to was prepared and stamped at Colonel Fertig's Headquarters, Esperanza, Mindanao, and then Carried to Mambajao, Camiguin Island, located off the north coast of Mindanao in the Mindanao Sea.

Recently I have seen a xerox copy of another Guerrilla cover, with stamp, and the usual cancellation of the 10th M.D., dated January 1, 1944, and carrying the Mambajao postal cancellation. However, the cover was not addressed to anyone; nor did it give the name of the sender.

Mr. Montalvan's statements reveal who prepared the covers for President Quezon and the others on his staff in the United States. It also indicates, first, that Colonel Fertig retained practically all of the Guerrilla stamps; and second, that the stamp on the Thommes cover received a post office cancel in the free area. This does not mean that the cover went through the post office, but instead was given a local postmark by a friendly postmaster. Some of the photocopies of covers that I have seen do not show post office cancellations from the free areas, but only the distinctive oval postmark of Fertig's Headquarters. In another letter, Montalvan wrote:

My intention to have postmarks of the different post offices was to show that on Mindanao the Japs occupied some municipalities only, not the whole island... covers that were postmarked by post offices are mostly mine, because when I took my vacation to visit my family, I used to pass through the nonoccupied areas and asked the postmaster, then I let him postmark the letters. All the letters at that time were sent by couriers.¹⁶

In a letter from Lt. Col J.L. Evans, M.D., the following statement was made:

Fertig did discuss these stamps with me, but said that they were unveiled as a morale booster and anti-Japanese symbols. In fact we did use them occasionally on correspondence inside Mindanao and I have seen them so used. As far as I know they never had an official status other than for that purpose.¹¹

Dr. Evans arrived on the Mindanao scene on the second trip of the submarine *Narwhal*, and subsequently served as doctor/radio operator for the command.

Australia

Now to travel to Australia, as at this point it is important to take a closer look at General MacArthur's South West Pacific Area Head-

quarters (SWPA) and that part of its operation which is of interest to us in this research.

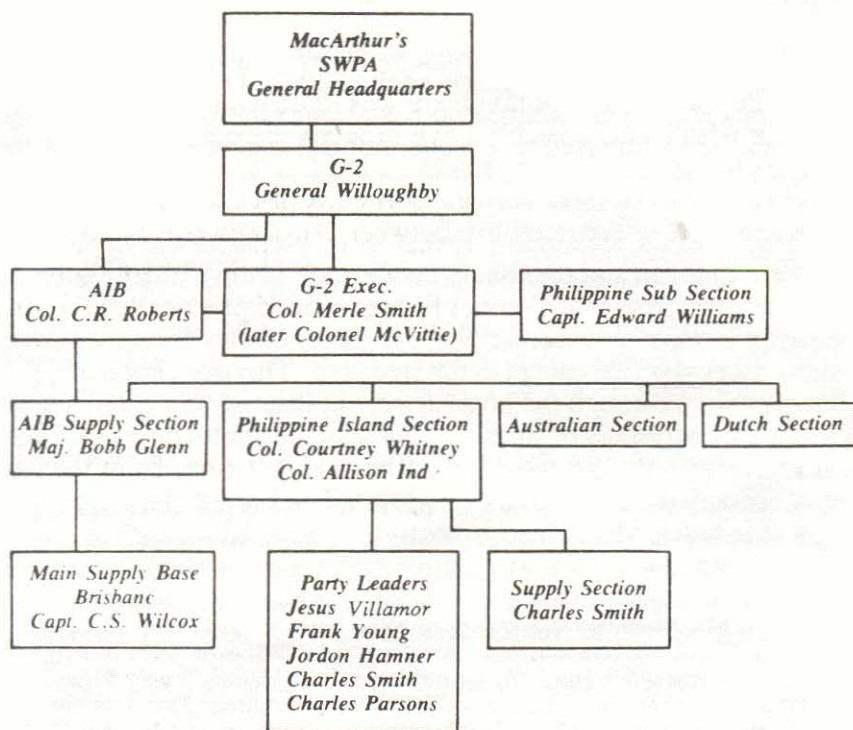


Figure 2. Organizational Chart

The American Philatelist

Within the headquarters structure was the Allied Intelligence Bureau, more commonly known as the AIB. The AIB was an intelligence-gathering agency, highly secret in nature and function. The three sections of the AIB that are of great importance to this study were the AIB Supply Section; Philippine Island Section; and the Philippine Island Sub Section. Their importance here lies both in their functions and in parts that the various people played within them. The organizational chart (Figure 2) gives a picture of how the chain of command was set up, which in the military is of the utmost importance as decisions are made only at the top levels, and what goes on within the structure must go up or down the chain through its various commanders. However, in the case of the Guerrilla stamps, this standard procedure does not appear to have been followed.

It was, therefore, important and essential to my research that I discover where in AIB any discussion had taken place about the printing of the stamps. It was logical that I look toward the Philippine Island Section headed by Col. Courtney Whitney, and I finally learned that there had been discussion in Colonel Whitney's office about a stamp.

It was important to learn that there was discussion, and that the only persons who could possibly have brought the matter up were Col. Charles Smith and Cdr. Charles Parsons. It is an established fact that these two officers were very good friends of Colonel Fertig. Also, both had made a previous trip between Australia and Mindanao by submarine bringing in medical supplies, arms, ammunition, radios, and other badly needed items for both the guerrilla military organization and the civilian population.

According to Mr. C.M. Nielsen:

There are no radio messages in the voluminous files in the archives from Colonel Fertig to Australia that mention either the plates for currency or the stamp. Consequently, I assume that Charles Smith carried the message himself, either oral or written. Smith served as a sort of procurement officer while he was in Australia in respect to getting supplies for Fertig.¹⁴

Interestingly enough, Nielsen feels that the Guerrilla stamps were not postage stamps, for this reason: "No fee was collected for delivery of messages; courier service was free, but of course all who used it were either guerrilla officers or Provisional officials, so it might be called an official mail."¹⁴

Nielsen has done a great deal of study of the Emergency and Guerrilla Currency of the Philippines, and a number of his articles have been published in the *Bank Note Reporter*.

Col. Charles Smith was a national war hero. He and a few companions sailed a small boat from Mindanao through Japanese-controlled waters to Australia, leaving Mindanao in early December 1942 and arriving in Australia several weeks later, on New Year's Eve.⁸ According to a statement by him to Arnold Warren, Charles Smith was supply officer of AIB.²

Continued Next Issue...